

Scoping Document

NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE **Seeks Your Comments on the Essential Fish Habitat Components of** **the Monkfish, Atlantic Herring and Atlantic Salmon** **Fishery Management Plans**

Your comments are invited

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the New England Fishery Management Council (Council) are proposing to develop Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for the Monkfish, Atlantic Herring and Atlantic Salmon Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) under the authority of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). The EISs will evaluate Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) designations as well as impacts to EFH from fishing and non-fishing activities.

EISs for the proposed Monkfish, Atlantic Herring and Atlantic Salmon FMPs will analyze the impacts of EFH management alternatives on the natural and human environment. You will have an opportunity to comment on any aspect of the EFH components of the Draft EISs, including the range of management alternatives to be addressed which minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse effects of fishing activities on EFH. The EFH designations will also be re-evaluated.

Why is NMFS proposing to take action?

Under the MSA, an FMP must describe and identify EFH, minimize to the extent practicable adverse effects on EFH caused by fishing, and identify other actions to encourage the conservation and enhancement of EFH. These EFH components were originally presented in Amendment 1 to the Monkfish FMP, approved by the Secretary of Commerce on April 22, 1999; The Atlantic Herring FMP, approved October 27, 1999; and Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Salmon FMP, approved April 21, 1999. These FMP amendments are also known collectively as the EFH Omnibus Amendment

In response to a U.S. District Court order (*AOC v Daley*, September 14, 2000), the NMFS is re-evaluating the EFH components of these FMPs including a range of alternatives to minimize adverse effects on EFH from fishing. EISs will be prepared according to the requirements specified by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Analysis and subsequent management alternatives may be presented as one NEPA document addressing EFH for all three species or as two or more separate NEPA documents addressing the EFH for each species separately or in combination with another species.

What is the process?

The publication of this scoping document and an announcement in the *Federal Register* of our intent to prepare the EISs initiates the formal EIS development process. Information collected during previous scoping processes for the EFH components of FMP amendments currently under development, including Amendment 10 for scallops and Amendment 13 for groundfish, may be incorporated.

After gathering information during the scoping period, NMFS and the Council will select a range of management alternatives to be considered in the Draft EISs and public hearing documents. NMFS and the Council will distribute the Draft EISs and public hearing documents containing management alternatives and an impact analysis of the alternatives for public review. During a 45-day public hearing and comment period, you may comment on any aspect of a draft EIS, including the alternatives under consideration and the analysis of the impacts. Following a review of public comments, NMFS and the Council will choose management measures for submission to the Secretary of Commerce within an FMP Amendment if warranted.

Why should I comment?

NMFS needs your input both to identify EFH management issues and develop alternatives to minimize, to the extent practicable, adverse effects of fishing on EFH. Your comments early in the development process will help us address issues of concern in a thorough and appropriate manner.

You may submit written comments by November 21, 2001 to:

How do I comment?

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Additionally, there will be a public scoping meeting on Wednesday, November 7, 2001 from 7-9 p.m. in the Friend Room, Sawyer Free Library, 2 Dale Ave., Gloucester, MA.

What action is NMFS considering?

NMFS is considering the need to revise EFH designations for monkfish, Atlantic herring and Atlantic salmon based upon any available new scientific information, and is considering potential designations of Habitat Areas of Particular Concern. NMFS will consider a range of alternatives to minimize adverse effects of fishing activities on EFH.